



# **Nutrition Education for Early Childhood**

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
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# Introduction

## Nutrition Education for Early Childhood

### Importance of Nutrition Education

Eating well can make a positive difference in a student's ability to achieve their full academic and physical potential. For young children, healthy eating is learned through actively watching and doing. By providing positive food experiences, early childhood programs help children to develop an awareness of good nutrition and develop healthy eating habits for a lifetime.

The Centers for Disease Control says that nutrition education strategies are most likely to promote lifelong habits for good health if they: help children learn the skills needed for healthy eating behaviors; provide opportunities to practice these behaviors; and make nutrition education relevant and fun. Providing frequent nutrition education to early learners is key to developing lifelong healthy eating habits.

### Defining Nutrition Education

Nutrition is the study of how the body uses food for energy and growth. In addition, nutrition is also the investigation into how nutrients affect the body to maintain health and protect from chronic diseases.

Nutrition education in early childhood should:

- be age-appropriate
- be positive
- be fun, interactive, and engaging
- begin to teach children the relationship between food and health, as well as expose children to a variety of learning experiences about foods
- help children start to develop sound attitudes and knowledge about food, nutrition, and health
- be integrated into daily routines whenever possible, such as mealtimes and transitions

In addition, the education offered should:

- Meet the [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards: Guiding Principles](#)
  - Meet the [Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Nutrition](#)
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## All Wound Up for Another Day!

<b>Content Standard:</b>	Nutrition for Growth, Health, and Energy Needs
<b>Performance Standard:</b>	A.4.3 Identify the benefits of relationship between physical activity (using energy) and the need for food and water; state that people need to eat food to have energy and grow
<b>Summary and Key Concepts:</b>	Different kinds of foods help us grow and learn. (Rationale: Pre-K-K children could define food as anything you eat and eating some things do not necessarily help growth or learning.) Food gives children energy to move.

### **GOALS/OBJECTIVE:**

1. Children will learn that eating breakfast helps their bodies start each day strong, and food, like fuel, must be supplied throughout the day so the body can work and play.

### **SUPPLIES NEEDED:**

- Small plastic or metal “wind-up” toy
- Paper
- Crayons

### **TIMELINE:**

This lesson can be flexible, from 10 to 30 minutes, depending on time spent coloring.

### **ACTIVITY:**

- Ask children to sit in a large circle on the floor. You should sit on the outside of the circle.
- Wind the toy loosely (a few cranks) and before placing it near the middle of the circle, tell children to watch carefully what happens to the toy. Ask them what you could do to make it move again (“wind it up”). This time, wind up the toy, set it in motion, but catch it before it completely runs down. Quickly rewind the toy to keep in continuous motion.
- Explain that the body is something like the toy in that it can work for hours but eventually runs down (runs out of energy) and must be “wound up” again. Ask the class how bodies get “wound up.” State that food, eaten at different times of the day, keeps energy levels high and the body “wound up” so that they can work and play without having to stop.
- Have children take turns winding up the toy and letting it go across the circle. While a child is winding it you can say that the toy is eating a morning meal or eating a snack, etc. Then when the toy is winding down ask children what does the toy need? (To be wound up – more energy.) The toy may need to be wound up several times to make it across the circle.
- Ask children when they eat during the day. Do they eat more than once a day?

- Ask why we need to eat more than just once to work and play all day long. (The body needs to be refueled or “wound up” every few hours to keep going.) Just like the toy needing to be wound up to keep going, we need to eat several times to make it through a busy day. How might they know when they’re starting to run out of energy (i.e., feel hungry, get tired, stomach rumbles, get cranky...)?
- Stress that there is a long time until breakfast. Like the toy which they saw run down, our bodies run out of energy overnight and need to be refueled or “wound up” at breakfast.

**CLOSURE:**

This part of the lesson may be adapted for time. Pass out paper and crayons. Have each child draw a picture of their favorite nutritious breakfast including foods that they eat and drink. Optional: After they are finished drawing, children should share their pictures with each other. While sitting in a circle, have each child hold up their drawing and identify the breakfast choices on the drawing. Make a bulletin board display of the breakfast drawings.

## Student Chefs

<b>Topic:</b>	Nutrition for Energy and Growth Identification and Classification of Food
<b>Performance Standards:</b>	A.4.1 Identify why people need to eat different kinds of foods A.4.4 Match food groups to their primary contributions for a healthy body, realizing that some foods are better fuel than others (nutrient density) F.4.1 Recognize foods by name F.4.4 Identify the basic food groups, and give examples from each group for meals and snacks
<b>Summary and Key Concepts:</b>	Active play to pretend to make favorite and new foods, name foods.

### **GOALS/OBJECTIVES:**

1. Children will select and name different types of food using play food and pictures.
2. Students will make decisions to “cook” types of foods and name their creations.

### **SUPPLIES NEEDED:**

- Designate a play area as the “kitchen” or “restaurant” and set up accordingly with table, chairs, counter space, toy cook top, and other toy dishes and utensils. Consider drawing a cook top burner on a large piece of paper, and laminating for use as a makeshift cook top
- Plastic play food
- Clean, empty food containers and/or boxes

### **ANTICIPATORY SET:**

Ask students what foods they like to eat. How do they think they would make this food?

### **TIME LINE:**

15 minutes for initial discussion, then this is a free play activity.

### **SET UP:**

Designate a play area as the “kitchen” or “restaurant” and set up accordingly with table, chairs, counter space, toy cook top, and other toy dishes and utensils. Consider drawing a cook top burner on a large piece of paper and laminating for use as a makeshift cook top. Have laminated pictures of food as “recipes” to encourage new ideas.

### **ACTIVITY:**

Children will be able to pretend they are a chef in the play kitchen. They will be able to “cook” their favorite foods and also “cook” new food creations for their friends. Ask students to name the foods they are preparing. Do they think this food will give them lots of energy? What else do they think about the food?

### **CLOSURE:**

Encourage all children to take turns pretending to prepare a food and share their food with others.

## Suessville Snack

<b>Topic:</b>	Identification and Classification of Food
<b>Performance Standards:</b>	F.4.1 Recognize foods by name F.4.2 Describe different kinds of food (by physical and sensory characteristics - shape, taste, color, texture, etc) F.4.3 Categorize foods by source (plant, animal), including processed foods F.4.4 Identify the basic food groups, and give examples from each group for meals and snacks
<b>Summary and Key Concepts:</b>	Try new foods. Describe new foods.

### **GOALS/OBJECTIVES:**

1. To celebrate Dr. Suess's birthday or to go along with a Dr. Suess unit.
2. To encourage children to try new foods as snacks.
3. This can be a fun parent/child activity for an open house or other event for a Dr. Suess weekly theme.

### **SUPPLIES NEEDED:**

Enough of these items for each child to sample:

- star fruit (washed and sliced)
- mango (peeled and cubed)
- sugar snap peapods (washed)
- cheese curds
- hard-boiled eggs (peeled)
- whole wheat bread (cut in cubes or strips)
- paper plates, napkins, toothpicks, plastic forks, and spoons

### **ANTICIPATORY SET:**

Read *Green Eggs and Ham*, *The Sneetches* or another Dr. Suess story.

### **TIME LINE:**

Shop for food and prepare food samples before class. Plan for a 15 - 20 minute class session.

### **SET UP:**

Set up table with plates, napkins, toothpicks, utensils, and food items

Shop and prep food the day before, and set up station on the day of the activity.

Print riddles for teacher use during the lesson.

Place the food items in bowls on the table, so the students can see the items.

### **ACTIVITY:**

Show the foods to the children, and have them repeat the names. Have the teacher read the riddles to the class, and have the students guess the answer.

When the correct answer is given, then share the food item to taste.

### ***Dr. Suess Riddles***

Directions: Read the riddle. Ask children to think about a food from the table that meets the riddle and have them share the answer! Pass out the food that is the answer to taste.

Riddle one:

My inside is orange  
With a taste that's fandango  
My outside is green...  
I am a: \_\_\_\_(mango).

Riddle two:

My seeds are inside  
A green pod squad...  
I am crisp, I am sweet.  
I am: \_\_\_\_(a peapod).

Riddle three:

Won't you try it?  
Will you please?  
I come in many colors,  
I am curds of \_\_\_\_(cheese).

Riddle four:

I am hard boiled,  
Sam-I-am likes me green,  
With your toast at breakfast,  
I may be seen.  
I am: \_\_\_\_(hard-boiled egg).

Riddle five:

I am made of whole grain,  
What your body should be fed.  
You might use me in a sandwich,  
I am \_\_\_\_(bread).

Riddle Six:

On a Sneetch's belly,  
I am so very cute.  
Sweet and tasty,  
I am a \_\_\_\_(star fruit).

### **CLOSURE:**

Ask children what other snacks could fit Dr. Suess stories?